

Elijah was on the run.

He was on the run for doing exactly what he was supposed to do; speak truth to power. And, like is often the case with power, they don't want to hear the truth, they don't want the facts, they don't want a narrative that doesn't fit their own.

In a grand contest, Elijah had shown Baal to be a false God. He had silenced Baal's priests and shown how powerless Baal really was in the face of YHWH. He had proven YHWH's power beyond a shadow of a doubt. And yet, this was not enough to convince those in power, both political and religious, otherwise.

And so, Elijah was on the run.

Elijah, the prophet of God, of YHWH, was on the run because of Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab. She is known as one of the most infamous figures in the Hebrew Bible, known for her promotion of Baal worship and her ruthless pursuit of power. Later in the book of 1st Kings, she will play an influential role in the story of Naboth's vineyard, orchestrating Naboth's death so Ahab could seize his land. In this story, however, with Elijah, putting Baal and Baal's followers to shame, he was not to be tolerated, and so she sent a messenger to Elijah with a not-so-veiled threat.

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Things weren't changing. In fact, things, it appeared, were going backwards! He had followed God's calling, or so he thought. He ministers confidently to the widow earlier in the story. He feels connected to God, speaks boldly to King Ahab, and has been faithful despite everyone else. Everyone else, or so it seemed, had abandoned YHWH for the worship of Baal. They tore down the altars for YHWH and replaced them with ones honouring Baal. The prophets and priests who wouldn't convert were killed. Elijah felt like he was the only one left. And here he was, on the run for his life. He was a faithful prophet of YHWH, God, and he was running for his life, deep into the desert.

Discouraged and disappointed, he runs all the way to the mountain of God, where he hides away in a cave. He was at the end of his limits. There was no more gas in the tank; he was scraping the bottom of the barrel. Elijah had done all that he could do, and no matter what he did, it still didn't seem to make a difference. And so he hid, despondent, having his own pity party. In the face of the injustice around him, he was scared and paralyzed. He was waiting, either to die or for God to do something, because he felt that he couldn't.

As I read this passage, I found myself sitting there in that cave with Elijah. So many times in the face of injustice, I, too, have wanted to hide myself away from all the ugliness that exists in the world. I have a heart for justice, but so many times, I'm paralyzed by what to do. Things just feel so overwhelming. The hurts never seem to go away, and in fact, sometimes, it feels that when things couldn't get worse, they somehow manage to get worse. I find that I've had to take more than regular breaks from the news lately, because it just feels so overwhelming.

Take for instance, the Climate Crisis. I want to make a change, I want to do the right thing. In our house, we recycle, compost, we donate, reuse, gift away with buy nothing, try to fix or

repair, or purchase things that can be fixed. We think about where our stuff comes from, and we think about where our stuff goes. We donate to projects that we expect will improve the world. And when we plan home upgrades, we try to do so with a mind towards being ecologically responsible. And yet, when we hear about new mining, forestry, and resource extraction projects, climate goals being punted down the road or even ignored altogether, we feel discouraged because we don't know what else we can do, and we feel exasperated and helpless. We're doing our part, but does anyone else care? The evidence of climate change is literally outside the front door, and it feels like no one wants to change. It's almost like what we're doing doesn't matter.

Or consider the ongoing conflict in Israel/Palestine. I barely know how to talk about this decades-old conflict. For years, decades, Palestinians have been calling out, looking for help and support as walls are built, as land is illegally annexed, homes are destroyed, crops are cleared, people are arrested, tortured, and abused. More recently in Gaza, we've seen entire cities razed to the ground, refugee camps bombed, hospitals shelled, and food being used as a bargaining chip. And I feel so helpless, knowing there is little I can do to get in the way of the machinery that permits such atrocities. In our helplessness, we'd be forgiven for hiding away, saying there's nothing we can do.

I look at global politics, where bullies, autocrats and dictators run amok. Where loyalists, conspiracy theorists, and sycophants are given privileged positions of power; where treaties and agreements mean nothing; where consumerism, commercialism, business, and worship of the goddess economy and the almighty dollar are more important than the care and support of the most vulnerable in society. Where there are systems in place to help the rich get richer and the poor remain poor, all the while dangling in front of people the false carrot of the "American Dream," where if you only work hard enough, you can get ahead in life. And it's hard not to feel powerless.

And there are other injustices, such as the ongoing conflict between Ukraine and Russia. Or domestically, our seemingly ongoing cost-of-living crisis, the persistent housing crisis, or the lack of entry-level jobs or jobs for youth. And we're not even talking about the ongoing refugee crisis around the world.

One would be forgiven for wanting to hide oneself away like Elijah, overcome by the weight of the world.

Thankfully, though, the story doesn't end here.

Whilst hiding, Elijah is called to come to the mouth of the cave, "for God is passing by." What follows are some literally earth-shattering natural phenomena. And in each of these, a strong wind, an earthquake, a fire, we are, for a brief moment, led to believe that God would be present.

And isn't that our hope, our wish, our desire, our longing? When we're at the end of our resources, when we've spent ourselves trying to right the injustices of the world. When we don't know what to do, we look to God to do something fantastic, something dramatic, something that will not only catch our attention but the attention of everyone around us.

In the face of war and conflict, don't we want to see God step in and stop the conflict? In the face of politics, don't we want to see a saviour come in and return some sanity and civility? (if there ever was any). In the face of climate change, wouldn't you love to see some people miraculously change their minds and realize just how much of a crisis it really is? In our domestic problems, wouldn't we want God to act in such a way that the hungry are fed, the homeless are sheltered, the naked are clothed, and the unemployed can find jobs?

But, in this case, God is not present in the great and fantastic. Were disappointed to learn that God is not in the wind, earthquake, or fire. What follows, instead, is silence. A Thin Quiet, as our scripture describes it. A penetrating silence. And Elijah knows, he senses it, that God is in the quiet.

God is in the quiet.

Years ago, I was at a pivotal time in ministry. I was looking to make a significant decision about a course of action. I needed space to think, I needed space to hear God. So I went on a spiritual retreat. I had also arranged to meet with a spiritual director at that time. In the past, I had experienced the nudging from God, and others had helped discern God's voice. I was looking for a similar experience. This time, it was different.

Each time settled myself enough to pray or to read or to focus, I noticed I would quickly drift off and sleep. It didn't matter if it was the morning, afternoon or even the evening. I would fall asleep anytime I sat still. Maybe it was because I was coming off of a very stressful time in life, perhaps it was because I wasn't surrounded by any of my usual distractions. I don't know, but I would sleep at almost every opportunity I was given. I was frustrated because I went on a retreat to do one thing, to discern, and instead I was sleeping.

I mentioned this to my spiritual director. And as they listened to me express my frustration, a sly smirk came across their face. And when I was finished talking, they spoke two words to me, Holy Rest.

Holy Rest. They encouraged me not to fight this rest that I was being given. And at the same time, to trust and have faith that God can be at work, even when I am not actively doing something. They suggested that perhaps what I needed was to step back, and to listen in the quiet, in the silence, in the thin quiet, that God will work and speak when I'm not at work; when I wasn't getting in the way, so to speak.

Perhaps that's what Elijah needed, some Holy Rest, a break, a step back. Some reassurance from God, that God is the one at work, not in the fantastic, not in the astonishing, not in the amazing, but in the quiet. It's in the quiet, when all is pushed away, when the stillness reigns, that we are most attuned to God's presence. Perhaps this is why many folk can claim an encounter with God in nature.

So, for us today, who see all these injustices in the world around us, what are we to do? What are we to make of God's silence? Perhaps God isn't being so quiet after all. Maybe, Holy Rest, for us, is taking a step back to see what God is doing, to listen for God's still voice. Or maybe it's creating a little space for God to work. Near the end of our scripture, God is aware of what is happening, how the Hebrew people are being led astray, and God lays out before Elijah God's plan. God explains to Elijah what's going to happen next, what he's called to do. God was at work in ways that Elijah wasn't aware of.

So perhaps our encouragement is simply this: take heart. God's silence to the injustices of today doesn't mean that God is not at work, nor that God has permitted evil to run rampant. God sees and knows. God is aware.

Like the freezing and thawing water that cracks boulders, like the steady, slow movement of glaciers which carve out mountains and valleys, or the invisible, slow growth of tree roots underground, that over time crack sidewalks, lift foundations, and stabilize entire ecosystems. God's silence is not inattentiveness.

God's silence doesn't mean that God has turned their eyes away from the world. I believe that God deeply loves the world, God cares deeply for creation. I believe that God sees the suffering of humankind; God sees the pain and hurt that we cause each other; and I believe that God's heart breaks, just as ours do. And, I believe that God is at work in the world. In dramatic ways, and more importantly, in quiet, still ways. Just because we don't see God doing something doesn't mean that God's doing nothing. Just because God is quiet doesn't mean that God is inactive.

In the silence God speaks, in the quiet God works, in the stillness God intercedes. In addition to our calling to be peace makers, our calling is also to have faith. Faith that trusts that God continues to be up to something in the world. Whether it's quiet or dramatic, God continues to be at work; even when we're not. Even when we've retreated because we're discouraged, God is at work, and God meets us in our caves and encourages us out and back into the world.

God continues to be present and is acting, in quiet ways and in dramatic ways. Even if we feel that nothing is happening, God is still up to something. Sometimes the most important things happen after a time of silence.

Amen.